DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 191 527 JC 800 493

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TITLE Evaluating an Experimental Course: Humanities in Modern Living.
PUB DATE 10 Jul 80
NOTE 20p.: Paper presented as part of a Round Table Discussion at the American Educational Research Association/Special Interest Group for Two-Year College Research Conference (Columbus, OH, July 10, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Affective Objectives; Assignments; Cognitive Objectives; Community; Course Content; Course Evaluation; Course Objectives; *Family Life; Higher Education; *Humanities; Instructional Materials; Questionnaires; Relevance (Education); *Values Education
IDENTIFIERS University of Minnesota

ABSTRACT

This descriptive report examines the objectives and outcomes of two experimental humanities courses designed to offer students fresh perspectives on common human experiences in community and family life through stories, poems, films, art, dance, and essays. After introductory material describing course design, the report outlines cognitive and affective course objectives: (1) to make the student aware of the complexity of human experience as reflected in the humanities; (2) to effect an increased awareness of the different media used in the humanities; (3) to foster an appreciation of the multiplicity of values people bring to their experiences; and (4) to promote a synthesis of out-of-class experiences with course content through the completion of a term paper or a course project and through the maintenance of a journal in which students keep a day-to-day record of their reactions to class themes. The report then describes the two evaluation methods used in testing course effectiveness: a mid-term questionnaire soliciting students' reactions to course materials and content, and a pre- and post-test designed to empirically measure student progress toward the perception of knowledge as a relativistic complexity of various value systems. The report concludes with an examination of pre- and post-test results, indicating the success of the courses in achieving their objectives. (JP)

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EVALUATING AN EXPERIMENTAL COURSE: HUMANITIES IN MODERN LIVING

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10 JULY 1980

PAPER PRESENTED AS PART OF A ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION AT THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION/SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP FOR TWO YEAR COLLEGE RESEARCH CONFERENCE (Columbus, OH, July 10, 1980)

JC 800493

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Evaluating an Experimental Course:
Humanities in Modern Living

This paper is a report of a successful curriculum experiment at the General College--the development of a new course offered through the Division of Arts, Communication, and Philosophy. The report considers the design of the course, the course objectives, information on a journal assignment, and formative and summative evaluations of the course. Two appendices include a list of course materials used in each section of the experimental course and a copy of a questionnaire used to measure affective outcomes in students' learning.

Course Design

When my division proposed an experimental humanities course in 1977, we wanted the humanities--through stories, poems, films, art, dance, and essays--to offer students perspectives on common human experiences.[1] In order to provide a convenient and useful means of focusing the students' pursuit of this goal, we identified several areas of everyday living associated with the roles people assume at various times in their lives, with the responses they make to conflicts that arise in the context of experiences common to all people, and with the values they hold toward shared experiences. These "subject areas" were friendship, working, sports, community, family life, consuming, sex, self-realization, aging, leisure, nature, fantasy, mental health, and education. Besides helping students

increase their enjoyment of and participation in the humanities, we hoped that a course structured around a selected number of such subject areas would help students recognize the variety of responses that are made by people as they relate to others in the context of everyday living. Moreover, by studying specific problems encountered by different individuals and groups, students could learn to identify with and even to integrate the many points of view presented in these experiences.

In the initial year of the three-year experimental process, we divided each section of the course into an examination of three of the subject areas.[2] In the first experimental offering of 1375, working, friendship, and nature were the topics; in 1376, family, aging, and mental health. But as the experimentation evolved, I found it useful to restructure the categorization in the following way: in 1375 I focused on the students' attitudes toward and participation in community as it is related to--or as it appears in the context of--attitudes toward nature and friendship. In other words, everything studied in the course was directed toward establishing an awareness of the significance of community in people's lives. Similarly, in 1376 I focused on the students' participation in family living as it is related to their attitudes toward mental health and aging. In each section of the course, then, I subordinated two of the subject areas to one that served as the focus of the study. This synthesis of aspects of everyday living and the students' attitudes toward and participation in community and family life helped unify materials in each of the sections.[3]

Course Objectives

The course objectives noted below apply to both 1375 and 1376 and are intended to cover both the cognitive and the affective components of the

course design. The affective component attempts to move students to respond to and value the materials being considered. If students can identify with the experiences of specific characters, seeing similarities between their own experience and that of another person, then they can begin to reflect upon their attitudes and values. When that first step of reflection is taken, attitudes toward others and toward oneself are refocused, crystallized, and progress is made toward the organization of a new value system. The cognitive component leads the students to identify and apply specific ideas, analyze an entire work, or compare ideas in more than one course's material. As a means of synthesizing their learning in one section of the course, for example, students were asked to write a final course paper. This assignment arose from the work assigned on the course syllabus. Early in the course students read several short stories from an anthology by Stephen Minot. The title of his book, Crossings, provided the class with a general term which was discussed at length in class, and students worked toward defining that term in a workshop offered later in the course. For the paper, students were asked to define the term crossings, apply that definition to the experience of several characters (or persons) encountered in course materials, analyze the significance of one character's (or person's) "crossings," explain how a concrete experience (or attitude or value) in his/her own life applied to that definition, and compare his/her experiences to that of the character in order to note similarities and differences in the outcomes of each. As defined, the assignment also was aimed at helping students integrate the affective component of the course with the cognitive. Such an assignment acknowledges that "the essence of education is the mastery of experience; concentrating it into understanding, protecting it from memory's wear, and

relating it to life's needs."[4] As such, it invites students to take away from the educational experience something that makes sense to them personally.

Course Objectives, 1375 and 1376

1. Students will become aware of the complexity of human experience in such everyday areas of modern living as friendship, work, sports, community, family life, self-realization, aging, etc., by examing particular examples of human interaction in modern living as presented in the various forms of the humanities (stories, plays, films, poetry, art, etc.). In examining course materials,
   a. Students will learn to perceive similarities between their experiences and the experiences of characters (or persons) presented in course materials.
   b. Students will become aware of changes which may occur in their attitudes toward other people as well as in their perception of the significance of their own experiences.
2. By being exposed to the different media in the humanities (film, stories, music, poetry, art, dance, etc.), students will become aware of the specific ways in which the humanities offer multiple perspectives on shared human experiences.
3. By studying particular examples of human interaction, students will learn to identify and analyze the many points of view represented in the experiences of characters (or persons) presented in the course materials.
   a. Students will learn to identify details in stories, poems, films, etc., and to analyze the significance of those details in the context of a particular course material.

b. Students will learn to recognize and to analyze the wide range and varied nature of the feelings, attitudes, and values people bring to their experiences as well as the multiplicity of responses people make to specific experiences in their lives.

c. Students will learn to analyze conflicts that arise in the context of specific examples of human interaction (e.g., when two sets of values are in opposition, or when one character or person must decide among several courses of action in order to resolve a conflict).

4. Students will synthesize aspects of their out-of-class experiences with the materials the class provides by writing a term paper or by completing a course project.

Journal Assignment

During the course students were asked to keep a day-to-day record of their reactions to the materials studied in the course and perceptions of the relationships of those materials to their own experience. This assignment was aimed at eliciting from the students sustained responses on all course materials. The main criterion for evaluating this assignment was "completeness" of response, which I defined as writing beyond an initial response to the course material, which may take up only a matter of a few sentences. I asked students to stay with their initial response, adding more details to help me understand their generalizations, and being more specific wherever possible. The length of a "typical" complete response varies, but I set the rule of thumb as between three-fourths and one page in length (single spaced). In my assignment sheet, students were asked to respond in terms of:

1) Reactions to what you read or see in class. Sometimes you will have some time at the end of the class to do some jotting, but for the most part you probably want to put down your thoughts and feelings after you read something, while you're on the bus, or while you're between classes. Avoid summarizing what happened in the course material. Everyone in class has read or seen the same. They know what happened. I am looking for a reaction based on what you thought and felt about what happened in the story, film, poem, etc. Combine emotional and intellectual reactions.

2) Perceptions of the relationship of the course materials to your experience. Consider the subject matter and/or characters in the context of your personal experience. If some of the characters remind you of people in your own life, explore the similarities or differences you see between the two. If this leads you to writing about yourself or about someone you know, rather than keeping strictly to the course material, that's okay. When you examine your experience in the context of what you have read or seen in class, there are advantages, too. You may be learning about yourself as well as the subject at hand. Consider how and why the humanities invite us to make such comparisons. What syntheses are suggested?

Students hand in their journals three times during the quarter. Having students make entries in class two times early in the course helps them gain confidence in an assignment that is potentially intimidating and/or frustrating. Spending a minimum of class time reading some of the entries also helps them understand what is meant by completeness of response. The instructor also may use this journal assignment as a means of having students

respond to questions discussed in class or other questions that are aimed at the affective component of the course objective.

Evaluations: Narrative Format

Students in the course completed mid-term formative evaluations based on an instrument which asked them to respond to items they were to fill in before completing the response.

Mid-Term Evaluation Questions

NOTE: In all cases below, the word material refers to one of the following: [Here the instructor appends a list of the stories, poems, films, etc., studied up to this point in the course.]

1. The one material I enjoyed most was _____ because _____.
2. The one material I enjoyed least was _____ because _____.
3. The one material I gained the most insights from on the subject of family living (community) was _____ because _____.
4. The two materials I thought best complemented each other (fit together) in terms of what they had to say about the interrelationships between family living and mental health (or aging) were _____ and _____ because [use similar question for community, friendship, and nature].
5. If I were asked to summarize how I have been able to organize materials on the subject of family living (community) and draw my own conclusions based on my study, I would say I have learned that _____.

Examples of students' responses to the last question give some idea of how their summaries relate to the course objectives:

-- Everything that is read in class (or lectures) I try to relate to my personal life. I try to evaluate, and without making quick decisions or accusations, figure out the reason we (the characters in the book also) do things they do.

-- Objectivity is the essence of drawing valid conclusions.

-- I have learned that there may not be one right answer to a problem, but by discussing things or actually acting or playing out the role by getting involved with nature or other people, you are helped to relate to the community much better. Participation.

-- Everything is related and interrelated. Very complex and nothing is simple--also many values, ideas, concepts are shared between people--in all ages and years and times.

I chose this format for asking questions so that students would be free to answer the questions in their own way and yet be directed to answer with some degree of specificity. Rather than asking open-ended questions, I have found that such directed questions elicit more serious and sustained responses. At the same time, I believe that students recognize such an evaluative instrument as an opportunity for them to synthesize some of their work in the course. Such mid-term evaluation also can provide important formative data, thus allowing for a change of direction in the teaching of the course.

Evaluation: Empirical Study

Research on the humanities course also included a two-quarter study which attempted to measure some of the affective components in the course objectives. This research was undertaken in order to determine changes in attitudes towards oneself and others (as illuminated by the method of

the humanities used in the course) and to learn what changes may occur in students' attitudes toward the complexities in human interaction by the humanities.

The latter aspect of the study incorporated some of the ideas generated by William G. Perry, Jr., in his book, Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme.[5] Perry's study of Harvard students attempted to measure movement during their college years between a commitment to simple dualism, in which authority is considered absolute and queries on complex issues can be reduced to unambiguous answers, to a recognition of a relativistic framework for knowledge, in which a multiplicity of responses is possible and in which right answers are right only in the light of a particular context. In simple dualism, teachers exist to tell students right answers, and students are uncomfortable with and even reject outright any attempts to move them to consider the contexts of problems. As students begin to accept the possibility of a plurality of answers and/or points of view, they tend to withold a commitment to contextual thinking, instead viewing multiplicity in terms of "everyone has a right to his own opinion." As their intellectual maturity progresses, students perceive knowledge as contextual or relativistic. Perry defines relativism as a plurality of points of view, interpretations or value systems, each depending on a close examination of the various contexts involved in an issue. Eventually, students are able to "apprehend the implications of personal choice"[6] in a world assumed to be relativistic. Perry adds, "This revolution is precipitated by the failure of a dualistic framework to assimilate the expanding generalization of Relativism."[7] As a result, students establish criteria for evaluating the complexities around them and acknowledge "a kind

of dynamic equilibrium which is, in part, dependent upon those portions of the environment which are salient at any point in time."[8]

I saw in Perry's model an attempt to get at the organization of a new value system, a high-level component in the affective domain. With this in mind, I devised a 37-item questionnaire for the 1375 course. In 1376 I condensed the questionnaire to 20 items. Both questionnaires were administered as pre- and post-tests. A copy of the condensed form of the questionnaire is appended to this report.[9]

I devised items that related to the following objectives:

1) Students will learn to accept contextual, relativistic thinking as a basis of their educational experience in college.
2) Students will gain insights into their own attitudes and values and also learn to identify with the attitudes and values of other people.

Outcomes of the questionnaire were tabulated and data submitted to computer analysis. The division's research facilitator directed the computer programming. Data were gathered on a frequency comparison of students' responses to eight response categories (1 = very strongly disagree to 8 = very strongly agree), a comparison of means from pre- to post-tests, and correlations of pre- and post-tests results. Interpretation of data is based on levels of significance generally regarded as statistically valid. As a whole, the data showed some significant changes from pre- to post-test scores relating to both objectives mentioned above.

1. Students' Frequency of Response to Eight Categories

The revised questionnaire consisting of 20 items included several items that were significant when comparing students' responses to the eight

response categories. Items 10 and 15 showed a response that was statistically significant, and Items 18 and 19--although significant to a lesser degree--still showed a major change from the pre-test to post-test.

2. Comparison of Means of Pre- and Post-Tests

The significance of all of the above items is supported by the compilation of a comparison of mean scores from pre- to post-tests. These complementary data can be shown graphically on the chart below, which divides selected items on the 20-item questionnaire into questions relating to contextual relativistic thinking and questions relating to the role of the humanities in students' experience.

Acceptance of Relativism	Direction of desired change	Desired change met	Humanities and personal experience	Direction of desired change	Desired change met
Item 5	down	yes	Item 1	up	yes
8	down	---	2	up	---
10	down	yes	3	up	---
11	down	---	4	up	yes
12	down	---	6	up	yes
14	up	---	7	up	---
16	up	yes	9	up	yes
17	down	---	13	down	---
18	down	yes	15	up	yes
20	up	yes	19	up	yes

The chart above shows that of the 20 questions selected in which I sought to find changes in student responses (higher or lower responses to the eight categories), 11 of the items do show such a desired change. Below is a

summary of the comparison of means for these 11 items. All of these items, again, are statistically significant because of their low significance outcome (statistically less than .10).

Item	pre	post	difference in means
1	5.40	5.75	.35
3	6.00	6.37	.37
4	4.79	5.19	.40
5	3.84	3.34	-.50
9	6.06	6.50	.44
10	5.29	4.88	-.41
15	5.77	6.42	.65
16	5.92	6.33	.40
18	4.06	3.37	-.69
19	6.08	6.50	.42
20	6.09	6.68	.59

Responses to these items suggest that students made significant changes in their attitudes both toward relativistic thinking and also toward the function of the humanities in their personal experience. Students made some progress toward accepting the multiplicity of responses, interpretations, and points of view confronting them. In addition, they concluded that the humanities contribute to their understanding of themselves and of others.

An important footnote to these conclusions is that students in six of eight cases responded significantly to questions which addressed (either directly or indirectly) the humanities as the area of consideration. That is, items 3, 15, 16, 18, 19, and 20 show that students' responses tended to cluster in a pattern of acceptance regarding the role of the humanities in their intellectual and emotional development.

3. Correlations

Similar significant data were found in computations of correlation, which measure the relationship between pre- and post-test outcomes. I wanted to test responses to show a low correlation with pre-test responses so that I might infer that students had made a significant change in their attitudes toward those items. Numbers 2, 3, 14, 17, 18, and 19 on the 20-item questionnaire are examples of such low correlations which, when considered in the context of the earlier data, suggest that the changes students made on these items were significant.

4. Summary

I am encouraged by the results of the empirical study we have begun to analyze. I believe that the Perry model of intellectual and ethical development is one that is potentially applicable to measurements of student change of attitudes toward the humanities, particularly since it addresses a wide range of the affective component in a humanities course. When combined with other evaluative instruments such as course papers, questionnaires that solicit narrative responses, and entries from students' journals, the Perry scheme's measurements are enriched and validated. Students often reject the subject matter because it does not fit their dualistic conception of knowledge; however, this attitude can be turned to the students' educational advantage if we demonstrate the usefulness and, in fact, the desirability of conceiving of knowledge and the process of education as dependent on an examination of particular contexts. In doing so, we can free the students to accept the value of the humanities in their personal experience.

Footnotes

[1]We planned a course that would be divided into two four-credit offerings, General College 1375 and 1376, each independent of the other. That is, students were not required to take one section of the course before taking the other. Since the humanities requirement for undergraduates at the University of Minnesota is eight credits, our students could fulfill that requirement by completing both sections of the course.

[2]The academic year at the University of MInnesota is divided into three ten-week quarters. We learned during the first year of experimentation that trying to integrate more than three subject areas in ten weeks was inappropriate.

[3]Other combinations of subject areas are possible. For example, in 1375: community, sports (leisure), working; in 1376: family living, self-realization, consuming.

[4]Philip Ritterbush, Let the Entire Community be the University (Washington, D.C.: Acropolis Books, 1972), p. 10.

[5]New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1970.

[6]Perry, p. 150.

[7]Perry, p. 150.

[8]D. R. Krathwohl, B. S. Bloom, and B. B. Masia, Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals. Handbook 2: Affective Domain (New York: David McKay Co., 1964), p. 181.

[9]Since most of the data refer to the condensed form of the questionnaire, I will not append the original questionnaire.

APPENDIX A

List of Course Materials for 1375 and 1376

1375

Required Texts: Margaret Craven, I Heard the Owl Call My Name, Dell Paperback

Helen Hanff, 84, Charing Cross Road, Avon Paperback

Harold G. Henderson, An Introduction to Haiku, Anchor Paperback

Farley Mowat, A Whale for the Killing, Penguin paperback

Films: Deliverance, Select Films

The Persistent Seed, National Film Board of Canada

Louise: A Community in Religious America

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, Budget Films

One-Eyed Men Are Kings, McGraw-Hill Text Films

1376

Required Texts: Judith Guest, Ordinary People, Ballantine Books, paperback

Mark and Dan Jury, Gramp, Penguin paperback

Stephen Minot, Crossings, University of Illinois paperback

Patricia Gordon and Ned Hoopes, eds., Great Television Plays, Vol. II, Dell paperback

Paul Zindel, The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds, Bantam paperback

Films: The Seventh American Family (student film, edited by instructor)

Harold and Maude, Paramount films

Dying, WGBH-TV, Boston, Massachusetts

Death of a Gandy Dancer, McGraw-Hill Films

APPENDIX B

Student Questionnaire: Attitudes Toward the Humanities

For each of the statements that follow in this questionnaire, please assign a number based on the following scale of responses. After you have read the statement, note that number on the answer sheet. REMEMBER: This is not a test. It will have no effect on your grade in this course.

1 -- very strongly disagree
2 -- strongly disagree
3 -- moderately disagree
4 -- somewhat disagree
5 -- somewhat agree
6 -- moderately agree
7 -- strongly agree
8 -- very strongly agree

-- The statements in this first section refer to novels (including stories, dramas, and non-fiction books which recreate or focus on the experiences of individuals), poems, and narrative films (which portray stories of characters' lives).

1. I enjoy reading novels.
2. When I read a novel or view a film, I can often identify with the problems encountered by the main character(s).
3. One of the exciting things about reading a story or poem, or about viewing a film and then discussing it, is being able to find out what other people think the story, poem, or film means.
4. I enjoy reading poetry.
5. When I read a novel, I like to be able to know that there is only one way of interpreting the interaction of characters.
6. Reading and discussing poetry is a means of coming to an understanding of some of my deepest feelings.
7. I enjoy watching films.

8. When I read novels, I am often "turned off" because I don't understand why characters react the way they do.
9. After I have viewed a film, I want to discuss what happened in the film in order to better understand the characters and the meaning of their interaction.
10. The problem with studying poetry is that everyone has a different interpretation of what the poem means.
11. When I view a film, I watch it primarily to be entertained.
12. I am not interested in trying to figure out the significance of the interaction of characters after reading a novel or viewing a film.
13. The problem with film is that it has little to do with the experiences of real people.
14. I realize that every time I discuss a novel, story, poem, or film, there may be more than one point of view possible when trying to understand the significance of a given experience.

-- Each of the following statements refers to your study of the humanities in this course. I will define the humanities here as novels, stories, dramas, films, and nonfictional stories that recreate or focus on the experiences of individuals.

15. Through studying the humanities I can gain insights into understanding some of the reasons behind my attitudes and/or values.
16. When studying the humanities, I realize that sometimes the humanities raise problems rather than provide answers.
17. I am uncomfortable studying the humanities because they deal with opinions instead of facts.
18. I am uncomfortable when discussing novels, stories, or films because there is never any one "right" answer to the problems the characters encounter.

19. Through studying the humanities I can better understand why people react differently to the same problem or crisis.

20. I think the humanities can effectively communicate the complex and sometimes unpredictable nature of human interaction.

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